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# DEMOCRATIC FACTIONS AND INSURGENT REPUBLICANS.

BY HERBERT CROLY.

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THE comparative strength, the respective principles and policies and the probable future of the two dominant American parties have recently become more than ever deserving of close scrutiny by students of contemporary politics. The new economic and political conditions, which have been intruding themselves on public attention, and the new political issues, which have been derived therefrom, are bringing with them not only changes in the trend of national policy, but changes in the standing and the outlook of the two parties which in the American political system are responsible for the formulation and execution of a national policy. Neither of these parties occupies the same situation that it did a dozen or even eight years ago; and inasmuch as their new standing promises to have very important effects upon the political future of the country, it were well to understand just what the change amounts to and what its probable consequences will be.

The advantages of a comparison of the two parties as to their respective strength are to all appearances wholly in favor of the Republican. Since it won its first Presidential election in 1860, it has failed only twice to place its candidate for President in the Executive chair. Forty-four years, that is, out of a possible fifty-two, it has controlled the executive branch of the general government, and during almost as large a proportion of the same period it has elected a majority to one or both Houses of Congress. What is the cause and meaning of this almost uninterrupted and increasing preponderance? Is there any reason for believing that it will or will not endure?

The recent ineptitude of Democratic leadership and the failure

of Democratic political tactics must be traced to a fundamental source; and that source is, I believe, nothing else than the inadequacy of the traditional Democratic creed to the solution of contemporary political and economic problems. The social and economic changes which have gradually been accumulating since 1870 demand political and economic measures which the Democratic party cannot undertake without proving faithless to a part of its traditions; and as its leaders are necessarily and sincerely seeking to find a basis for its policy in its inherited principles, their political platforms are continually vacillating between the two horns of a dilemma. Either they propose to take certain positive action, which is from the point of view of their traditional creed unprincipled, or else they remain content with a negative policy which derives its high political propriety from the antiquity of its lineage. And no matter which alternative they accept, they disgust a certain section of their own party without convincing either the thoughtfully radical or the thoughtfully conservative element in public opinion.

Our contemporary political and economic problems seem to have taken form particularly for the purpose of bringing out the inconsistency resident in the traditional Democratic creed, for that creed is a hodge-podge of radical and conservative ideas and tendencies. The Parker wing of the party has, for instance, no right to claim that they are the true believers and that Mr. Bryan and his followers are heretics. The latter are seeking to accomplish a result which both the Jeffersonian and Jacksonian Democracy cherished as essential to the perpetuity of American political institutions—viz., the abolition of what is believed to be economic privilege; but as partisan Democrats they are embarrassed in formulating effective remedial measures, because, according to another aspect of their political tradition, the desired result should have been accomplished either automatically by free individual competition or at worst by the positive action of the State governments. The conservative Democrats, on the other hand, either shut their eyes to the danger of economic privilege or claim that the danger can still be averted by the enforcement of existing laws; and even the more radical Democrats, in proposing such remedies as a Federal license for corporations engaged in interstate commerce, are paralyzed by the influence of the tradition, which proposes to reach the consummate Demo-

cratic social condition by means of individual aggrandizement, the rigid protection of States rights and national irresponsibility. It obviously makes any centralizing proposal with a bad conscience, and it tends either to qualify its measures into impotence or to claim that because of the purity of its Democratic motives it can apply centralizing remedies without committing the crime of centralization.

Assuming that the existing economic and political situation demands the assumption of certain additional national responsibilities, the Democracy cannot escape from its dilemma. It cannot become a national political party equipped with authoritative leadership and an adequate programme without abandoning the traditional creed, which hitherto has constituted its reason for existence. Every once in a while a group of "pure" Democrats get together, usually somewhere in New York State, and propose to rejuvenate the party and to formulate a platform on which it is sure to regain popular confidence. But the platform always proves to be a statement of traditional principles, which are supposed to be perennial because of their indestructibility, and which are indestructible only because they are continually being repeated. They are perennial, that is, only as words and because of their ability to fill gray beards with the illusions of youth. The best way to fertilize them would be to bury them for a while in the ground and to water them with a little disinterested and concentrated consideration of the real meaning of contemporary political and economic problems.

The Republicans, on the other hand, are better qualified by their partisan traditions to assume leadership during a period of national reorganization and increasing national responsibilities. The statement is frequently made that there is really no fundamental difference of principle and tendency between the two parties, but that is not true. The Republicans are by way of being more national than the Democrats, because Republicanism originated in the determination of certain Northern Whigs and Democrats to save American nationality by denationalizing the undemocratic institution of slavery; and in so doing they assumed a neglected and dangerous but essential national responsibility. The assumption of this responsibility tended to nationalize the party, in spite of the sectional residence and prejudices of its membership; and the party has shown ever since a tendency to

remain national. This tendency has been expressed in a greater willingness to make the general government assume its share of the national responsibilities and in a larger amount of political opportunism—in the French sense of that word. Opportunism in this sense consists in a preoccupation with the national interest and a general readiness to take any action demanded by the national welfare.

Republican political opportunism has, until recently, enabled that party, far better than the Democrats, to adopt new policies without causing any serious internal dissensions. Both the conservatism of Parker and the radicalism of Bryan caused a revolt of the opposing faction, which had its justification in some untimely aspect of the party tradition. The tendency of irresponsible individualist Democracy is factious and distracting. Its adherents are instinctively far more preoccupied with their personal, class and local interests than they are in the interest of the American people, in so far as they can be collectively expressed. This tendency was disguised during the Middle Period, because the great majority of the Jacksonian Democrats were homogeneous in feeling and because their individual interests ran along similar lines; but since the war the Democrats have lost this homogeneity of feeling, interest and point of view. They have become classified; and this classification is separating the well-to-do from the wage-earning Democrat, the Eastern from the Western, the liberal from the conservative and the constitutional from the Jacobin. After such classification has taken place their party traditions do not encourage Democrats to remain together, to submit to discipline or to subordinate individual and local to general interests; and when they do secure a show of unity, it can only be on the basis of some compromise, which is often humiliating to men who believe sincerely in their own ideas. Thus the Bryan, Hearst or Cleveland Democracies, into which the party divides, are real factions, which in the end prefer party failure to success purchased by their own subordination; and any organization which is incapable to this extent of agreeing upon a partisan platform is even more incapable of formulating a national policy sufficiently representative of the contemporary national interest.

Considering the proportion of the popular vote which remains stubbornly Democratic by both interest and conviction, it would

be absurd to predict that the party will never win another election. They may well, in the fall of the present year, elect a majority of the members of the next House of Representatives. Under certain not improbable contingencies they stand a respectable chance of electing the next President. But the assumption of power will only expose their weakness. Responsibility for action will bring out the internal dissensions, which they have not been able to conceal during a period of irresponsible agitation; and even if they are able actually to accomplish any legislation, it cannot be the expression of a genuinely national interest or idea, because ideas of that kind cannot find any sufficient nourishment in the soil of the Democratic party.

That the Democracy may have a better fighting chance of winning an election next fall than it has had for many years is due, not to its own increasing strength, but to an unexpected and most significant weakening of Republican party discipline. For the first time since the factional struggles of the early eighties the Republican party is threatened with serious internal dissensions. A definite group of Republican Insurgents has been formed in both Houses of Congress; and these rebels represent or believe that they represent a much larger proportion of the party vote than is indicated by their numbers. They are fully prepared to carry on the fight during the Congressional elections next fall, even if by so doing they endanger the success of their party.

How is this eruption of internecine warfare to be reconciled with the claims made on behalf of the Republican party as an organization capable of responsible action in the national interest and of enforcing discipline for the benefit of such action? Why is it that the gentleman now occupying the White House, who used to be known as the Secretary of Peace, has, in spite of the most amiable intentions, become a War President? Why has his conciliatory policy served only to tear his party apart, whereas the thunderbolts and lightning which played around the head of his Insurgent predecessor compelled the ostensible if not the entirely cordial submission of his party associates?

The answer to these questions calls for a more careful analysis of the contemporary national interest than has yet been attempted and a comparison of the results of this analysis with the traditional Republican national policy. Since 1865 the dominant aim

of the Government has been the rapid economic development of the country accomplished by means of the most diversified and intense stimulation of individual enterprise. The utmost encouragement was offered to individuals and corporations to appropriate and develop the sources of wealth contained in the national domain. Laws even more liberal than those which prevailed before the war were adopted, and these laws were construed and administered with even greater liberality than they were conceived. The natural resources of the country—its land, minerals and timber—in so far as controlled by the general government, were practically given away to anybody who had the initiative to claim them or the capital to develop them. To balance this encouragement of the extractive industries, the Republicans maintained and developed an extremely high protective tariff, the object of which was the prohibition of competitive imports and the full employment of American capital and labor in every practicable branch of economic activity. By this combination of measures a complete but very artificial and overheated national economic system was built up. The country was enabled to produce a huge surplus of agricultural produce and raw materials which could be exported in order to pay for the enormous quantities of capital and labor whose importation was encouraged; and in order still further to accelerate the process, domestic capitalists were allowed a free hand in organizing the home market. They were permitted to adopt almost any business methods they pleased so long as economic activity was promoted and an apparent condition of "prosperity" was created.

It is characteristic of the impotence of the Democratic party that the effective opposition to the traditional Republican policy has gradually developed within the ranks of the Republican party itself. The first insurgent Republican of prominence was Theodore Roosevelt, and his earliest attack was concentrated upon a portion of the system which was at bottom only incidental to its main purpose. He attacked the position of economic privilege which, as he believed, certain large corporations and capitalists had acquired in the national economic system; and the popularity of his campaign prevented the more "regular" Republicans from effectually opposing it. But the agitation could not rest at that point. Any permanent and dangerous economic privileges enjoyed by individuals or corporations must depend

upon the appropriation of certain natural resources denied to actual or possible competitors; and the fact that such resources had been thoroughly appropriated and the resulting economic opportunities exploited was a preliminary symptom that a more essential aspect of the traditional system was breaking down. The Government could no longer encourage the development of the natural resources of the country, because there were, comparatively speaking, no more natural resources to develop. The chief support of the structure reared by the Republican party suddenly collapsed, not because of any attack, but of its own inherent weakness.

The policy deliberately adopted by the Federal Government, as the trustee of the national domain, of giving away its property could not last. The incessant supplies of virgin soil, primeval timber and new mines, which were forced into competition with the older sources of supply, undoubtedly multiplied and cheapened the product so as to afford a large surplus for exportation, but it also encouraged a lavish waste of the raw materials. The trend of the policy was intimately to associate wasteful methods of production with abundance and cheapness of product and thus to divorce cheapness from economy. The effect of the waste varied in different branches of production: but it was sure at an early date to bring into operation the law of diminishing returns—that is, to threaten an eventual diminution of supply, to decrease the exportable surplus and to enforce economy by increases in the cost of production and in prices. The evidence of this condition consisted primarily in a constantly higher cost of living, which prevented the wage-earners from enjoying any benefit from their large money wages and which was as burdensome to industry as it was to domestic life.

An inevitable result, consequently, of the movement on behalf of the conservation of American natural resources was an increasing agitation for effective tariff reform. An excessively high protective tariff contributed to the prevailing waste of the American economic system, chiefly because it encouraged the employment of capital and labor in industries which could not be conducted in this country except under peculiar disadvantages. It had gradually become an essential part of a thoroughly national American economic system that some of the capital and labor so employed should be diverted to the more thrifty pro-



duction of the staple commodities. In the long run the additional capital and labor needed for this purpose will have to be obtained at home, because the constantly lessening exportable surpluses of natural produce will prevent the country from deriving it to the same extent as in the past from abroad.

The agitation for tariff reform, which appeared within the Republican party almost coincident with the agitation for conservation, was, consequently, by no means an accident. The bill which was passed in response to this agitation reduced certain duties which were unnecessarily high even from a prohibitionist standpoint and raised a number of duties which, high as they were, did not affect the desired object of prohibition. President Taft was apparently satisfied that the new law constituted a sufficient redemption of ante-election promises, and his satisfaction with the new law was not superficially unreasonable, because those pledges did not advance any principle of revision incompatible with a prohibitive tariff. A scale of duties calculated to give all American products an advantage in the home market sufficient for the abundant compensation of the labor and capital needed to produce them—such a scale of duties obviously means the exclusion of competitive imports. But President Taft failed to understand that public opinion was really demanding a revision which diminished the cost of the protectionist system, and because of this misinterpretation he compromised his position as the leader of the progressive wing of his party. The Republican tariff reformers with a better understanding of public opinion refused to accept the revision as sufficient; and the President's attempt to harmonize his party only gave determination and bitterness to the insurrection. If there had to be war the President should have been caught on the other side. His predecessor had placed him in a position which could be held only by fighting, but not being by disposition a warrior he instinctively tried to shirk the responsibility. The result is that he is by way of being alienated from that element in public opinion from which he should derive his strength.

If the foregoing analysis of the general situation is correct, the Republican party is facing one of the most difficult and dangerous crises of its career. Here is a party which is committed by its traditions to the formulation of a policy, genuinely expressive of the national interest, and which in the fulfilment

of that responsibility actually formulated a policy which for many years contributed to the economic development of the country and, on the whole, satisfied public opinion. Little by little, however, it is discovered that the national interest is demanding the modification of every important element in the economic system for which the party has in the past been responsible. During a few years under aggressive leadership the "regular" party machine quieted public opinion by consenting to certain modifications in its policy, but every concession encouraged further demands and, consequently, increased the opposition of those interests connected with the party who have benefited most from the traditional system.

In seeking to determine the comparative merits of the two parties to this decisive controversy, it would be a mistake hastily to assume that they are monopolized by the Insurgents. The latter are undoubtedly fighting for certain reforms the adoption of which is essential both to the redemption of the traditional responsibility of the Republican party and to the economic welfare of the American people. But while their purposes are deserving of all praise, the spirit in which these reforms are conceived and the methods by which they are pursued are not equally meritorious. The Insurgents are seeking to realize an essentially national programme in at least a partially factious spirit. Their insurrection has been due as much to a solicitude for local as to a solicitude for national interests. They are suspicious of the East; suspicious of the patriotism of their opponents; suspicious of much in contemporary economic and political life, which is essential to American national efficiency. They have made a bugbear of monopolies and straightway suspect a monopolist behind every opposing barrier. They have not as yet thought out either the meaning of their insurrection, the consequences of their reforms or the principles which underlie their programme. They have enunciated no theory of tariff reform upon which a sufficiently drastic and effective revision can be based. They have announced no method of conservation which strikes at the essential root of American economic extravagance—at the fact that not merely a few corporations and monopolists, but almost all American producers and proprietors have been encouraged to confuse business with speculation. In short, they have all the earmarks of agitators rather than statesmen, and not one of them

can be named (unless Theodore Roosevelt is still to be classed as an Insurgent) who is capable of inspiring general confidence and becoming a national political leader.

On the other hand, many of the "regular" Republicans, particularly a number of those most immediately associated with President Taft, are men capable of taking large views, of thinking out policies to their logical conclusion, of drawing measures of effective constructive legislation, of making efficient and public-spirited administrators and of inspiring personal confidence. They are being stigmatized as dangerously conservative, chiefly because the changes in the national economic interest and in the public opinion have moved faster than they could follow.

Finally, a doubt inevitably arises whether the legislative branch of the general government, as constituted at present, really has the ability to carry out the series of economic reforms demanded by the national interest. Both Representatives and Senators are at bottom district and State delegates in a national Legislature. Congress has succeeded in passing national legislation hitherto partly by log-rolling, partly by party discipline and partly in virtue of the fact that the national interest has been conceived chiefly as a composite version of individual and local interests. But the newer national policy demands that certain individuals and localities shall submit to temporary losses for the benefit of the national economic system, because such losses are the inevitable penalty of a change from the extravagance and waste of an overheated economy to one that is comparatively cool and hardy. A Congress composed of district and State delegates must be coerced into the passage of the necessary legislation; and the necessary coercion can be exercised only by means of stringent party discipline and the autocratic organization of both Congressional bodies. As it happens, however, Insurgent Republicanism is inimical both to party discipline and to the existing responsible (though perverted) leadership of the House and the Senate; and is thereby helping to destroy the means whereby the new national economic system must eventually be achieved. One can only fall back upon the hope that in the end the crying need for thorough-going economic reform will create the great increase in economic and political intelligence and in disinterested patriotism needed for its satisfaction.

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